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ABSTRACT

This model provides a structure for uniformly evaluating all operations of a school central office, where the assumption that those offices exist to provide services is tenable. The model provides a means for assessing the importance as well as the efficiency with which the tasks of central office operations are carried out. Formative data is generated which will assist in central operations planning. A summative score, which reflects a sensitivity to both importance and task-achievement of a section, is generated. The model, compatible with Management By Objective theory, has been piloted and is being field-tested for further development. (Author)

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An Empirically Developed Model for Evaluating the Central Office Operations of a School System

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An Empirically Developed Model for Evaluating the Central Office Operations of a School System

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OBJECTIVES

Purpose:

The purpose of this project was to design and test an evaluation model which could be applied to school central office operations. The following objectives served as development parameters: The model will provide a means to

1. Acquire data useful to the superintendent and board of education in making decisions relative to central office operations.
2. Acquire data useful to various directors and central office administrators in redefining and refining their operations.
3. Explore more fully the relationships that exist between central office operations and the ongoing processes of the schools at the building level.
4. Provide data useful for determining the extent to which certain operations of a school system should be centralized.
5. Bring the accountability level of central office operations to a level commensurate with that which exists in other components of the system.

PERSPECTIVE

School systems which have no centralized operations are rare. Many systems employ multiple assistant superintendents, directors, etc. who oversee wide-ranging programs and operations. Typically their work has been regarded as an input into the system. Field practitioners and others, however, may regard their efforts as outputs, in terms of services rendered.

In designing this model it was assumed that all operations and offices in the central office exist to provide services which will in some way facilitate or enhance the accomplishment of the primary mission of the school.[1] This suggested two premises which were used in constructing this model:

1. Those who work in the central office should be able to discuss their activities in these terms:
   1.1 As services rendered or made available to some recipient(s).
   1.2 What individuals or groups are those services intended for?
2. A scale which would assess the quality of those services could validly be that of the perceptions of the user(s); with respect to:
   2.1 The importance of the service to the user.
   2.2 How well that service is being provided or carried out.

METHOD

Developing the Instrument:

A first step in conducting the evaluation provided by this model is that of identifying the various departments, offices, and operations sections which exist in the central office. Inasmuch as this is an operations assessment, not a personnel evaluation, the fact that one individual or office may perform several roles is not germane.

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[1]"Services" were operationally defined as: "The performance of a task for the benefit of others, whether voluntarily, by request, or to fill a social need."

[2]An operations section, office, or department is said to exist as an entity when a clear mission, for which certain activities are being conducted, can be identified and associated with that office, department, or operations section.

Information must then be gathered in two areas of concern:
1. What services are being provided and by whom?
2. For whom are those services intended:

This information comes from those who staff each office or section. Items can then be generated which have these characteristics:
1. Each specifies, in operational terms, one and only one, service which is being offered by a given central office section or department.
2. Each service is identified as to its intended recipient(s).

Each department or section is then given an opportunity to review those items which pertain to its services. This affords a check for item validity and content coverage. The entire central office has then been defined as a set of services offered by a variety of separate divisions. This entire set of items is then reorganized so as to be subsumed under the headings of user categories. A set of sub-scales, each keyed to a target-user population then exists.

Administering the Instrument:

Each population is then administered a scale containing only those items which pertain to services available, or used by, that population. For each item the respondent is asked to make two responses in a forced-choice format:
1. How important is this service to you in your relationship to the school system?
2. How well is this service being provided or carried out?

Analyzing the Data:

After administering the instruments the data derived from all populations is organized so as to be under the heading of the section or office which performs the service. It may then be analyzed in several ways. Formative concerns may be addressed by calculating a percentage value for each response on each item. Results are tabulated. A somewhat more sophisticated statistic can be computed by constructing a 3X3 matrix, with columns headed "Considerable", "Moderate", or "Little" (referring to responses on the importance dimension). Rows are headed "Good", "Average", or "Poor" according to the achievement response categories. By calculating the percentage of responses occuring in each cell and summating those cells which represent acceptable importance/achievement combinations a performance ratio can be obtained for each item.

A summative score, which represents the achievement of the entire department or office on all services can be generated. This score will be comparable across all offices in the central office; making it possible to draw comparitive, norm-referenced inferences of a summative nature. This statistic, denoted "P"(Performance) is found by calculating the mean value of all scores for each response, on each item. This yields two mean responses for each item; one denoted the mean value of Importance (I), and the other the mean value of Achievement (A). For each item a product, IA, is computed and denoted as the item Evaluation (E). The entire set of I values are then summated as are the entire set of E scores. These two summations are denoted ΣI and ΣE respectively. The overall performance (P) of the department, considering all services and their combined level of achievement/importance is then represented by the one value obtained by evaluating this equation.[3]

$$P(\text{Performance}) = \frac{\Sigma E - \Sigma I}{2\Sigma I}$$

This value will range between zero and unity and may be considered to represent the extent to which that department has approached the maximum possible performance level.

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[3]The Rationale and derivation of this equation and procedure for its use are too lengthy to present in this draft. They are available and will be given by the presenter.

DATA SOURCES

Developing the Model:

This evaluation model was developed by six practitioners in the Shawnee Mission (Kansas) Public School system. Among them were the viewpoints of an assistant superintendent, a research specialist, a secondary principal, a central office director, a curriculum specialist, and an elementary principal. The model was designed to conform with existing MBO strategies and philosophy within the district. Statistical treatment of the data was suggested by methods used in existing program evaluations.

Using the Model:

The source of data for those using this model will be the populations who are specified as users of central office services and those who offer those services from the central office. In this project seven such user-populations were identified: building administrators, teachers, community(individuals and groups), central office staff, and, others. Within the central office thirty four discrete operations sections, offices, or departments were identified.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The objectives of this evaluation project were substantially achieved. The Superintendent and Board of Education were able to make several decisions in the domain of reallocation of resources. The Directors and other central office administrators are in the process of restructuring certain components of their operations. Although the third objective, being a process, is more resistant to measurement, it appears on the basis of intuition and observation that the process is in fact occurring. The final two objectives similarly, are not directly quantifiable, but the impression was that the project moved in the direction suggested by objectives four and five.

This evaluation model has been incorporated into the total management processes of this school system and results will be utilized in future decision making.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT

It appears likely that this model offers a promising entry point into evaluating a heretofore nebulous facet of school operations. Little previous effort has been made in this domain, while burgeoning accountability thrusts suggest that as many of the components of the educational system as can be evaluated should be evaluated. Where school systems are willing to place as many resources into central office evaluation as has typically been invested into teacher, staff, and program evaluation, the Shawnee Mission experience suggests that an innovative change in philosophy and a new area for experimentation in educational accountability can be developed.

Further developmental work is being carried out and the model will likely become increasingly robust. Others who are similarly interested are invited to make contributions to further this needed effort in evaluation. Certainly the thrust toward assessing the central office in operational terms deserves consideration.